



STATE OF TENNESSEE

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NEWS RELEASE

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**Children in state custody face educational barriers**

**Nashville, Tenn.** – Getting a good education isn't always a given for children in state custody, according to a new report from the Comptroller's Office titled "Educating Tennessee's Children in Custody."

Many children, whether neglected or delinquent, enter Tennessee custody already behind in school. Once in custody, some children are moved frequently and often change schools, making it harder for them to keep up. In addition, trauma surrounding the reasons children are placed in custody can affect their ability to learn.

Most of the state's approximately 10,000 custody children attend public schools. Others attend school in residential facilities, some run by the state Department of Children's Services and others privately operated.

National reports indicate that as few as 11 percent of custody children continue to college. Many never finish high school.

Using data collected by the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, the Comptroller's report found that multiple factors weaken many custody children's chances of academic success. These include living below the poverty level, mental health diagnoses, parents with little education, and parents in prison. Custody children often experience two or more of these risk factors.

Department of Children's Services officials estimate that 35 to 40 percent of custody children require special education services, about three times more than the estimated 12 percent of children identified in public schools. The Comptroller's report also found that one in five custody children who needs special education services does not receive them.

The Comptroller's report notes that DCS has improved overall the educational services for custody children in the last few years, but needs to focus more effort on juvenile offenders in state facilities whose academic outcomes are not included in the state's No Child Left Behind data.

The report also recommends that the state waive tuition fees at higher education institutions for young adults in or formerly in state custody.

The report suggests that improved collaboration among agencies and groups responsible for custody children's education could help and recommends that teachers receive training to understand the difficulties that custody children experience in obtaining an education.

The report is available on the Comptroller's Web site at [www.comptroller.state.tn.us](http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us). For additional information about this report, please **contact**:

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